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Leading otherwise: using a feminist-poststructuralist and postcolonial lens to create alternative spaces for early childhood educational leaders

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Introduction

The complex and diverse contexts of educational services and structures have meant that educational leadership is conceptualised and theorised in multiple ways (Sergiovanni 1984, Larson & Murtagh, 2002; Nupponen 2006, Harris 2004). Within the international research and theory regarding educational leadership, there is a growing body of work that recognizes the importance of early childhood leaders in ensuring quality programs and positive outcomes for children and their families (Rodd 1996, Kagan and Bowman 1997, Jorde Bloom 1997, Woodrow et al. 2008, Thornton et al. 2009). In this paper and in accordance with international definitions, Early Childhood Education (ECE) encompasses the Birth-8 years and includes childcare, pre-school and the early years of school (OECD 2006). This paper takes the position that this diversity of programs and services becomes pivotal in discussions of early childhood leadership. Alongside this diversity, the changing terrain of the early childhood context in Australia is similar to many other countries around the world and includes the introduction of nationally mandated guidelines to inform early childhood educators' pedagogic and curriculum decisions. These guidelines include The Early Years Learning Framework for Australia (DEEWR, 2009) intended for the birth-5 years, the National Curriculum (ACARA, 2009) for ages 5+, the National Quality Framework (2011), and My Time, Our Place: Framework for School Age Care in Australia (2011). Similarly to international trends, there are great expectations on Australian early childhood educational leaders to implement the changes associated with these national reforms (Muijs et al 2004:157).

Research from diverse countries indicates that there has been limited theorisation of early childhood educational leadership that supports leaders to further understand and conceptualise their roles in these times of significant policy change (Woodrow and Busch 2008, Muijs et al. 2004). Much of the early childhood leadership literature that does exist discusses approaches to leadership but does not interrogate the underpinnings of such approaches. For example, leadership styles including distributed leadership, shared leadership, and transformative leadership are often discussed (Harris 2004, Heikka and Waniganayake 2011). These, however, fail to recognise or explore the discourses that circulate within and through the assumed principles and organisational structures underpinning the approaches.

This paper will draw on feminist poststructuralist and postcolonial theories to identify alternative discourses of leadership that can support early childhood professionals to reconceptualise their leadership roles. The paper begins by considering the gendered and fractured early childhood profession and discusses the entangled relationship between feminism and advocacy for young children. Following this, the authors examine the possibilities and limitations of feminist perspectives for early childhood leadership. The theoretical work then expands to include an analysis of how feminist poststructuralist and postcolonial analytical tools contribute to alternative thinking about early childhood leadership. The authors explore how an awareness of alternative conceptualisations of leadership can support early childhood educators and leaders to look at the complex, shifting, contingent and contradictory nature of working in early childhood services and position their leadership practices in ways that are valued and respected.

A gendered and fractured profession

Education, as a broad field, has historically been positioned as women's work within and through Western patriarchal societies and is 'deeply implicated in the production of the female citizen' (Dillabough, 2005, p. 131). More specifically and as a result of working with the youngest of children, the early childhood profession is positioned as the example and norm of this intersection of education and the 'natural' work of women. In part due to the dominance of these discourses, the early childhood profession has been and is populated largely by women and as such is referred to as a feminised field. The term 'feminised' refers not only to the numerical dominance of women in the workforce but also refers to the 'way the work is thought about by parents, workers, government

policy makers and, not least wider society, assumes childcare to be 'women's work' (Cameron, Moss and Owen 1999: ix).

Within this though, the histories of early childhood education in many countries can be read as stories of diversity and difference in the ways feminist ideals have influenced reform (Dehli 1993, May 2006, Whitehead and Trethewey 2003). This difference is in part due to the fact that many of these histories tell stories of a 'fractured' and deeply gendered profession.

As stated in the introduction, in many countries early childhood education and care (ECEC) involves a diverse range of settings and services that include childcare, preschool and the early years of school (OECD 2006). The concepts of 'care' and 'education' are particularly important in both historical and contemporary understandings of ECEC. The diversity and complexity of early childhood leadership is compounded by the integration of 'education' and 'care' and an emphasis on 'care' (however defined) in the contemporary context.

It is beyond the scope of this paper to examine in depth the historical relationship between childcare and education but it is pertinent to note that early childhood 'work' involves both and the boundaries between are increasingly blurred. The Australian situation is similar to that in 'Britain and elsewhere in Europe'...where in England and Scotland...'childcare' services for under-5's are given an overtly educational role, while schools are encouraged to become sites for a range of 'childcare and other services'. Brannen and Moss (2003: 18) argue 'liberal ideas of care and a particular 'gender regime' work together to create policies concerning the workforce involved in children's care...'. In many countries these policies have not led to equitable industrial conditions for early childhood educators. This situation is the result of complex and historically located social, economic, political and cultural factors.

In this discussion we must be mindful that the positioning of the work of women in the early childhood field is complex. Women are not merely passive in the highly gendered constructions of their educative identities. Women simultaneously resist and participate within and through the structures of the field that work to constrain and enable the work and positioning of women within it. Early childhood professionals invest in dominant identity constructions while they simultaneously resist the othering and marginalisation of their work as educators that results (St. Pierre, 2004; Dillabough, 2005; Asher, 2010).

In this space, many women working in the education field broadly have struggled to find voice and space to position themselves and their work in equitable ways in masculinist, Western, white educational systems (Dillabough, 2005; St. Pierre, 2004; Larson & Murtadha, 2002). The relationship between early childhood educational reforms and equality for women however has often worked against gender equity for the women working in early childhood in specific and nuanced ways. To illustrate this complexity, Dehli's (1993) discussion of the history of the kindergarten movement in North America traces how the development of Froebel's 'pedagogy of the kindergarten' positioned women in particular ways. As she states 'the freedom such a pedagogy was to produce, assume and elaborate a bourgeois project of the modern state inhabited by self-regulating (masculine) individuals, while depending upon and reinforcing gendered divisions of labour and the regulation of women's sexuality' (21). Delhi draws from Steedman (1985) who argued that 'one of the significant effects of kindergarten pedagogy was to elaborate a model of teaching as a form of mothering: the kindergartner, and later the primary school teacher, was to become a 'mother made conscious' (20). Froebel's ideas were interpreted in various ways (eg Reid). Whilst his positioning of women could be read as 'Anti feminist' it must also be acknowledged that as women took on identities as teachers and 'transformers' of 'improper childhoods' this work provided space for the exercise of agency and activism in many countries. As Delhi (1993) argues, 'The kindergartens may have meant many things for the women involved, but the work was part of a broader movement for social reform and an extension of a feminine sphere of influence' (27).

Early childhood leadership: A space for feminist activism?

In this paper it is acknowledged that the term 'feminist' can best be understood as an

'umbrella term' that encompasses many different perspectives (Osgood 2006). However, underpinning these diverse 'feminisms' is a shared concern with women's position in society and a desire to alter gender inequities (Delmar, 1994; St Pierre, 2004; Osgood 2006).

As previously noted, early childhood leaders are working in a feminised field and as such may not face the same feminist struggles for voice and representation that arise in male-dominated organisations. However, within their feminised field, women are struggling to find a voice that articulates their leadership effectively. This is partly due to the reality that whilst early childhood education is a feminised profession, in Australia (as in many other countries) it is part of an educational system that is

'socially, culturally and economically reproductive as differentiated by class, race and gender' and is situated in an Anglophone nation state, which is White and masculinist (Blackmore 2006: 188). Early childhood leaders' voices are therefore often 'complementing but not worrying' masculinist norms of leadership (Blackmore 2006: 195). As Rea (2011) states, the large number of women working in the early childhood workforce does not necessarily mean that anything feminist is going on. One of the purposes of this paper is to 'worry' some of the dominant discourses of leadership from an early childhood perspective. Feminist theory provides a useful starting point for this process.

The difference between much educational leadership research and that of feminist educational research is that feminists place gender at the centre of any analysis and work to address gender inequity. Delmar (1994: 6) notes that within feminist theory there lies 'an active desire to change women's position in society'. Over the last two decades, feminist researchers have had a major influence on leadership in the corporate world (e.g. Bass and Avolio 1997, Kakabadis et al. 1997, Eagly and Carli 2003) and within higher education, secondary and primary school institutions (e.g. Blackmore 1999, 2010a, Sachs and Blackmore 1998, Caldwell-Colbert and Albino 2007). However, within the literature on early childhood educational leadership, the influence from feminist perspectives is scarce (e.g. Woodrow and Busch 2008). For example, in their recently published book, Waniganayake et al. (2012) list 'critical, humanistic, instrumental and scientific' approaches in the section titled 'Theorising early childhood leadership' with no reference to feminist theory. However, there is some feminist research happening in early childhood leadership. For example, Hard (2006) analysed early childhood educators' understandings of leadership and the 'role that traditional notions of 'heroic, male leadership play in their enactment of leadership' (p.3). As researchers, we argue that there is a compelling need for more research into early childhood leadership using feminist theory for many traditional, male dominated concepts of leadership and leadership discourses do not recognise nor reflect the diverse and feminised context of early childhood education in Australia and internationally (Peeters 2008, Shah 2010).

Feminist poststructuralist theories provide opportunities to rethink early childhood leadership through centering on and troubling the power relationships that circulate within dominant and institutionalised discourses. This troubling of power relationships is necessary in order to '...problematise the subject so that it proliferates, runs amuck, and overturns the conceptual orders that control our imaginations and shut down lives' (St Pierre, 2004, p. 346). Feminist scholars argue that to bring about change in women's positions in leadership and how their leadership is recognised and respected, it is essential to engage with the concept of power and how it operates within and through society. Those who can teach us most about

how power works are the groups who have been most marginalised by the existing power structures: those who have been 'othered' by the dominance of hegemonic, Western masculine discursive social practices.

Research has shown that it is in social circumstances where class, race and gender intersect with dominant ways of being that the effects of power relations become most obvious (Robinson and Diaz, 2006: 67). It is within the in-between spaces of these intersections - in the interstices - that othered voices can work to illustrate the problematic workings of dominance and to position and explore alternative ways of imagining and being in the world (St Pierre, 2004; Fitzgerald, 2010). This work at the intersections of these categories though creates some conceptual 'messiness' with the differences among feminists (liberal, radical, cultural, black, materialist, poststructuralist and postcolonial) contributing to a recognition of this (Blackmore, 2006: 186). It is through examination of this messiness that includes exploration of gender and race, that we can

'worry' dominant masculine Western ideals of leadership and suggest alternative ways of conceptualising leadership within early childhood contexts. Examining this messiness requires analytical tools that can explore power, knowledge, identities and agency in more nuanced ways.

Exploring alternative tools: Discourse, power, knowledge and truth

Exploring the multiple discourses circulating through concepts of educational leadership can provide important opportunities to examine how knowledge, truth and power operate to silence particular ways of being an early childhood leader and privilege others. Foucault (1972: 49) describes discourses as 'practices that systematically form the objects of which they speak'. Discourses can be conceptualised as the 'shared meanings' and 'ways of thinking' that constitute 'what can be said and thought, and about who can speak, when, and with what authority' (Ryan et al. 2001: 51). Agency is, in part, contingent upon our awareness of how we are being constituted within these discourses. Understanding the multiplicity of discourses that work to 'define who we are' as sites of 'contestation and struggle' opens up spaces for considering alternatives (Walkerdine 1990: 199). For example, dominant discourses of leadership drawn from Western white masculine models have the power to define and normalise leadership understandings (Bloom & Erlandson, 2003; Murtadha & Larson, 2004; Hard, 2006:2). Within these discourses, the power and authority of a feminised and diverse early childhood field and its community oriented models of leadership are 'othered' and silenced. A deeper understanding of the ways power circulates through the social world in 'capillary' like ways to reach into every detail of life and construct particular ways of 'being' (Foucault 1980) opens up the possibility of critique and challenge to the ways early childhood leaders are defined and positioned.

In identifying the disciplinary powers circulating within and through early childhood settings we are able to examine what truths are constituted and reconstituted in how educators can be leaders. Foucault (1977) called these truths 'regimes of truth'. He argued that such 'regimes' exist within all societies. These 'regimes' circulate to establish and support rules and regulations that define and depict the truth about how the individual should act and speak. For example, relatively current neo-liberal discourses construct early childhood leadership in particular ways. The changes that are occurring in early childhood care and education, both in Australia and many other countries, are occurring in a neo-liberal climate where 'the project of economic and social transformation' is defined by the notion of the free market (Connell et al. 2009: 331). Moss (2007: 4) argues that neoliberalism 'reduces everything to instrumental questions of money value and calculation, management and technical practice'. For example, the increasing emphasis on 'flexibility' of the workforce means that early childhood leaders are working with a largely casual team, paid on an hourly basis. Alongside this 'flexible' team, the 'notionally gender-neutral' early childhood leader is seen to be successful as an 'entrepreneur', which is culturally speaking a variety of masculinity' (Connell et al. 2009:332).

These 'regimes', like the one discussed, often construct 'binaries' that work to position people (and in this case early childhood leaders) in particular ways. These binaries also are not neutral or value free and as

has been discussed, work to position early childhood images and practices as other and marginal. Examining (and deconstructing) some of the binaries that exist in discussions around a dominant educational leadership that privileges white, Western, masculine ways of being is a useful strategy for understanding early childhood leadership more deeply.

Discourses of early childhood leadership: deconstructing binaries

The process of 'deconstructing' something involves pulling it apart to see how it works. 'In poststructuralist theory deconstruction refers to taking apart concepts and meanings in texts to show the politics of meaning within them' (MacNaughton, 2005:77). In this section, we 'pull apart' some of the language that is used in leadership theory in order to better understand the discourses that both construct and reflect ideas about ourselves as early childhood leaders. In doing this work, we are drawing on concepts developed by French poststructuralist language theorist Jacques Derrida (1930-) who argued that 'words and images are used to prove something and fix how we understand it' (in MacNaughton, 2005:78). Deconstruction

enables us to question the ways many words, images and concepts (e.g. about leadership) are used and in this process, enables us to create 'spaces' for considering alternatives. Indeed, deconstructing the 'deep structures' of a 'truth' provides possibilities for women to be 'freed from the concrete of foundations and absolutes that have constructed and secured them as weak, irrational, powerless, etc (St Pierre, 2000a:483).

One of the tools used in deconstruction is that of binary analysis. The concept of a binary relies on Derrida's concept of 'Differance' in that 'meaning depends on differences between words and images (signifiers), and so can only be relational, not essential or inherent' (MacNaughton and Williams, 2009:269 emphasis mine). One of the most significant binaries used to construct ways of thinking about the social world is that of male/female, masculine/feminine. As Calas and Smircich (1997: 342) note:

Feminist poststructuralists...posit, in general, the importance of the structure masculinity/femininity in sustaining the durability of practices, discourses, and forms of signification that allow certain activities the claim of knowledge, while disallowing others. Organisational analyses based on feminist poststructuralism(s) focuses on the intersections between patriarchy and organizational knowledge, and the social/discursive relations, which sustain these intersections.

Examining the intersections between 'patriarchy and organisational knowledge' produces diversity and difference but rather than try and bring this difference under control, we draw from Lather's (2006) arguments for 'proliferation' and 'multiplicity' to develop our understandings of early childhood leadership. As we trouble 'tidy binaries' our knowledge about what it means to lead in early childhood proliferates, expands, and differentiates rather than solidifies (Lather 2006: 36). Drawing from the work of Spivak (1999), Lather suggests that rather than generating a 'cure' or the 'truth' about early childhood leadership, we may be on a path of 'deferred fulfilment'(42). This may mean that in drawing from the work of Deleuze (in Lather 2006: 43) we may be contributing to 'a thousand tiny' leaderships rather than further solidifying the binary of masculine/feminine. In this, it is important to work to produce and re-produce fluid, non-essentialised images of successful educational leadership that are responsive to historical, political and social contexts and avoid defining yet another normalised way to be a leader for women (St Pierre, 2004; Murtadha & Larson, 2004; Fitzgerald, 2010).

Western patriarchal and hegemonic masculine knowledges dominate and circulate through and within leadership discourses. This knowledge circulation creates and re-creates binaries of: authority/nurturance; authority over/authority-with; power as domination/power as energy or activism; leader/educator and authority/care (Gore 1993: 74). In ECE policy and practice many of the binaries identified by Gore are constructed and re-constructed, overlap and interrelate. For example, in early childhood educational practice the 'leader/educator' binary is very closely aligned with that of the 'authority/ nurture' and the 'authority/care' oppositions identified in much research (e.g. Petrie 2003).

The construction of a binary between authority/nurturance and authority/care illustrates the power of language to both reflect and construct ways of thinking about important aspects of leadership. These two binaries resonate with the 'rational/emotional' binary embedded in much educational leadership literature (Blackmore 2011). In a Western white masculinist model of educational leadership, the word 'authority' carries with it more status and power than 'nurturing' or 'care'. Some of the ideas and subsequent ways of being associated with authority include rationality, strength, certainty and decisiveness. The words 'nurturing' and 'care' invoke notions of tenderness, gentleness, connection and patience (emotional). Whilst women educators, particularly of young children, are encouraged to be nurturing and caring, these qualities carry images of subordinated feminisation and are not seen to be desirable in the dominant white masculine image of a leader. It is important to acknowledge here that 'the hierarchy within a binary is not inherent in the words and is not inevitable or accidental: it is socially produced' (MacNaughton, 2005: 85). In beginning to both worry and re-construct images of early childhood leadership, a more nuanced approach to interrogating the hierarchy established here could open up alternative 'spaces' to consider early childhood leadership differently. The positioning of leadership as either 'authoritative' or 'nurturing and caring' (and 'authoritative' with more status) is a simplistic approach to understanding the complexity of early childhood leadership that marginalises and silences the ways of being in

community that characterise the field.

Blackmore (2011: 207) argues that the 'rational/emotional' binary embedded in mainstream literature on educational leadership was challenged in the 1990's and that 'the emotional dimensions of organisational change and leadership are now widely recognised in the leadership, organisational change and school improvement literature'. Despite this challenge, the idea of a 'real' leader still carries with it a concept of decisiveness and rationality and is often contrasted with a leadership that is weak and soft (emotional). This binary can be traced back to Plato and the divide between the function of the state and the family, with the masculine state responsible for the expert and objective education of the child and the feminised family as the caring nurturing, subjective unit (Cannella 1997). This distinction between education and care espoused by Plato so long ago threads through much contemporary theorisation of early childhood leadership today.

Worrying and claiming discourses of care for and with others in early childhood leadership

The concept of 'care' is one of those words widely used and seldom defined' and Brannen and Moss (2003: 4) argue that this ambiguity makes it a powerful concept. Petrie (2003) posits that 'care' implies 'duty' 'fondness and regard' with 'stress and anxiety' lurking in the background (62). When discussing care, the spaces between words and the co-location of some words with others communicate significant differences. Any discussion of care, childcare and child care must pay attention to these differences. Petrie (2003) points out that 'having care of, caring about, and caring for are different processes' and that the co-location of care within legal frameworks signals very different responsibilities such as 'duty of care' and 'child care' (62). The space between 'child care' and 'childcare' signals a difference: the former relates to children 'in care' such as under the guardianship of the state and the latter relates to a different policy field, that of a 'pedagogic' relationship. This paper is focused on leadership in the latter policy framework and therefore uses the word childcare. The discourses associated with childcare position early childhood leaders in particular ways particularly discourses that silence and marginalise the caring and community oriented aspects of early childhood leadership. These discourses, focused on authority and power, will be explored in more detail in this section.

'Historically, women have been positioned by the scientific management and eugenics movements of the 1920's as emotional and weak and not effective leaders but natural carers/teachers of young children as an extension of mothering' (Britzman 2007 in Blackmore 2011: 218). As noted in an earlier section of the paper, discourses of motherhood work in powerful ways to both reflect and construct ways of thinking about leadership in early childhood education. However, rather than viewing this as a simplistic discourse of nurture, it is important to acknowledge that although 'mothering' is routinely conflated with caring...it also involves censor, discipline and control alongside listening and comforting' (James 1989 in Reay and Ball 2000: 152). In their discussion of women's ways of working in education, Reay and Ball (2000) argue that the 'primary role in which women occupy a powerful position is as mother' and that 'being a mother involves training and guiding as the "person who knows best" (152). This idea of care and mother as integrally linked with 'authority' is an idea that has not been examined in depth in scholarship or research into early childhood leadership for it is the concept of the 'caring' role that has been dominant.

Sitting alongside the binary of authority/care is another interlinked binary pair of authority-over/authority-with. This binary works to silence leadership that is committed to creating critical communities where values and respect for diversity are at a team or organisation's core with a 'leader' who supports and enables all members of the team and organization community to actively share knowledge, lead ideas and challenge unfairness. In a 'neo-liberal climate, this leadership image is not easy as 'attention to diversity and broader issues of social justice at any more than a surface level (superficial) level is risky business for a "one size fits all' approach is seen as the solution to understand and engage with a diversified staff and community' (Fitzgerald, 2010: 101). Despite this difficulty, Judith Rosener (1990)

concluded that women leaders are more likely to structure flatter organisations and to support frequent contact and sharing of information in webs of inclusion' (in Bass and Avolio 1997: 202). Again, the words 'more likely' signal the variability inherent in the ways leadership is enacted. Feminist, post-structural and postcolonial leadership scholarship ask leaders to open

spaces of consideration rather than being 'locked into' a particular, gendered, white, ways of being a leader. This means that early childhood leaders may dance between 'authority over' and 'authority with' in their day-to-day experience of leadership. This dance involves balancing 'advocacy' (where the leader puts ideas out for discussion) in ways that invite 'inquiry' into those ideas (Senge, 1990) while remaining committed to action needed to support the image of community oriented leadership.

The final interwoven binary to be discussed in this section is the power as domination/power as energy or activism binary. This binary pair highlights the dominance of a white, Western masculinist discourse of leadership that positions the leader at the top of a hierarchy where most power is located. The leader wields their power and uses this to create change, compliance and results. Members of the team are told what is required and how these requirements are expected to be completed, rather than issues being discussed and ideas being shared and agreed upon. Working within this benevolent paradigm, dialogue, debate and questioning is not valued. The team are expected to be submissive to the leaders vision and expertise. This discourse constructs the early childhood educational leader as a success or failure based on the ability to 'control' and discipline anyone who does not achieve the desired outcomes. This means the leader focuses on the individual as the site of reform, and will teach, supervise and discipline rather than question institutional or organisational policies, resourcing and 'regimes of truth'.

The above discourses combined work in intricate and organised ways to silence and marginalise the community and care oriented work of early childhood leaders. Early childhood leaders struggle to move from being educators who nurture and work to build community in the field to find themselves in images of leadership modelled on white, Western masculinist values and norms. These dominant images of educational leadership have been challenged however. For example, Murtadha & Larson (2004) talk of an ethic of care as a central and underpinning component of the educational leadership of African American women who work for and within African American communities to bring about socially just change. They talk of a womanist perspective of educational leadership that responds to its own marginalised communities political and social needs. Murtadha & Larson (2004) and Ngunjiri (2007) draw on the term 'othermothering' (p. 352) when describing the sense of responsibility educational leaders felt towards all children within their educative communities and of this concept including expectations of nurturing and authority within it. Fitzgerald (2010), in her work with Indigenous educational leaders, speaks of the fundamental aspect of care – for community, for family and for children – in leadership practices that steer and guide with community members. All of these theorists speak of the need for marginalised and othered communities to be met by leadership in their educational services that see education as a service to the community and that meets community and its members with an ethic of care and respect.

While the positioning of early childhood educators as women-mothers, and their connection with community, has been used to marginalise and silence their contributions to education and leadership in the past, this women/mother/authority/community positioning might also provide a space of potential to blur the boundary between 'authority and care' in ways that help early childhood leaders to 'run amok' (St Pierre, 2004) and overturn discursive constraints that limit potential and construct early childhood as other.

Exploring alternative discourses of early childhood educational leadership

It seems impossible to accept that there is a 'one size fits all' concept of early childhood leadership that will be appropriate for all contexts and individual leaders. As Fitzgerald (2010) argues 'The implications of not accepting a 'one size fits all' in terms of the division of gender and leadership is that more nuanced ways of theorising for/about educational leadership can emerge' (101). Gemmill and Oakley (1997: 284) argue that 'for change to occur, it is necessary to experiment with new paradigms and new behaviours to find more meaningful and constructive ways of relating and working together'. Feminist poststructuralist and postcolonial paradigms provide ways to explore educational leadership discourses to create change in how educators recognise themselves as leaders, and practise leadership to support and work within pedagogies and communities.

Widening the analytic frame

The analysis presented above demonstrates that while feminist theories provide an initial conceptual platform for worrying dominant images of leadership in early childhood, relying on them alone is not enough if there is to be a reimagining of early childhood leadership. As Robinson and Jones Diaz (2006) state drawing from work by Best and Keller (1991):

Feminism provides important insights into the construction of gendered and sexualized subjects, while poststructuralism (like postmodernism) highlights the need to acknowledge the differences and heterogeneity that exist between individuals, groups and subject positions (Robinson and Jones Diaz 2006: 25).

Feminist poststructuralist theories recognise that gender is a social, political and historical construction within a patriarchal society (Weedon 1987) and place gender as the central position of their analysis, deconstructive and reconceptualist work. This is done through examining discourse, power and resistance in the work of women and through and within this, highlighting the tensions and alternative possibilities for being and practicing that arise from the intersections of dominance and marginality (St Pierre, 2004; Fitzgerald, 2010; Blackmore 2010b). The tools offered from within feminist poststructuralism that centre gender and re-examine dominant discursive ways of understanding leadership and their impacts on early childhood leadership, particularly understandings of discourse, subject and power/knowledge, help us to highlight the ways early childhood knowledge and ways of being are marginalised and constrained within current dominant masculinist images of a leader.

Early childhood leadership occurs however in an increasingly diverse field and in order to acknowledge and make room for the differences 'that exist between individuals, groups and subject positions' (Robinson and Jones Diaz 2006: 25), feminist and/or postcolonial theories also provide important prompts and tools. Feminist postcolonial theories recognise that race and ideas of cultural diversity are social, political and historical constructions built within a dominant Western masculine society (Loomba 1998, Mohanty, 2003). These theories place gender, race and difference as the central position when examining discourse, power and resistance to provide us with more nuanced ways of looking at how these constructions influence and affect early childhood leadership. These theories provide us with different and complimentary tools, including the ideas of the other and othering and its work in creating and maintaining binaries, for understanding the marginalisation of early childhood knowledges and for the deconstructive work required in order to re-imagine leadership within early childhood communities.

Understanding early childhood through the lens of the 'other'

The educative work in the early childhood field, while seen as important for building active and effective future citizens, has been systematically and historically marginalised and othered both within the education field and within society more broadly. This process of rendering a subject as 'other' involves marking the subject as different from the dominant norm, as notable only through these differences and essentialising these characteristics to all within that group. These processes of othering sit within a hierarchy of knowledge that then positions the othered subject and their knowledge as lesser than the dominant norm (Loomba, 1998; MacNaughton & Davis, 2001). As has been discussed previously, the feminised nature

of the field and its work with the youngest of children, has both supported and been complicit in discourses that have positioned the field, and the women within it, as working to a natural, maternal desire/need and sitting as other to a rational, objective white male subject (Burman, 2008; Cannella, 1997). Further, the work with young children, who are 'other' themselves to mature, developed adults, is seen as of less importance in the hierarchy of a developmentalist education field and as such, its knowledge and educative work and contributions

marginalised (Cannella, 1997). Also, as a result of the diversity in the field around such things as educator qualifications, service types, diverse educator gender and cultural backgrounds, the field as a whole is positioned as other than professional. These multiple positionings of marginalisation and of otherness in educative and social spaces makes turning to poststructural and postcolonial work of feminist others (e.g. Murtadha & Larson, 2004; Blackmore, 2010b; Fitzgerald, 2010) a necessary and productive turn.

The deconstructive work done in this paper demonstrates how intersecting feminist poststructural and postcolonial theories provide more nuanced perspectives from which to analyze and reimagine the early childhood leadership landscape.

Feminist poststructural, and postcolonial theories together can provide us with opportunities to consider how the early childhood field, and those working and leading within it, are constructed as the feminised and inferior cultural 'other' to an objective, rational Western masculine image of both profession and leader. In intersecting these theoretical concepts and positions, we are also mindful of Lorde (2003) as she discusses the need for interdependency of women across their differences:

Only within that interdependency of different strengths, acknowledged and equal, can the power to seek new ways to actively 'be' in the world generate, as well as the courage and sustenance to act where there are no charters. (p. 26)

In the previous section of the paper, we have 'experimented' with some of the binaries that have previously underpinned (and limited) ideas about educational leadership. In this process, we have challenged the some of the oppositions that have led to many 'conventional positions about educational leadership' (Reay and Ball, 2000). We have rejected being constructed in particular ways because we are a feminised field and challenged some of the essentialist notions about women as early childhood leaders. Reay and Ball (2000), Murtadha & Larson (2004) and others have highlighted the variations in the ways women educational leaders operate and argue that 'women's ways of working' are highly context specific (151). The ways early childhood leaders take up their roles are variable and although researchers such as Shakeshaft (1987, 1993) argue that women's ways of leading in education are 'more caring, less hierarchical' than many male leaders, we concur with Reay and Ball's contention that this may be more a matter of 'degree' than difference. It seems that as Fitzgerald (2010) argues, attempts to construct 'the woman leader' may be an impossible task and that 'the affiliation, the connection between the individual, her past and her present, determines how leadership is enacted' (99). Perhaps re-considering the oppositional positioning of some binaries has enabled us to catch a glimpse of the possibilities of leadership as a dance between two worlds: at times, being a decisive leader whilst in other situations being prepared to wait and watch.

While remaining fluid and flexible in responding to contexts, early childhood educational leadership we suggest has core principles. Drawing from theorists we have discussed in this paper (e.g. Murtadha & Larson, 2004; Blackmore, 2010; Fitzgerald, 2010) as well as bell hooks' (1994) ideas of teaching to transgress, we would like to offer alternative discourses of early childhood educational leadership. These alternatives see that leaders work with people to create spaces for leadership that lead to the creation of communities where knowledge and inequitable positioning is critiqued and reconstructed. Within this leadership image a leader can: be inclusive; learns alongside others; doesn't always have the answers and solutions; listens to and with others; and places ethics at the core of their work.

The leader is vulnerable and prepared to take risks and supports others to be vulnerable and/or to be risk takers. A leader would also work to make visible how power, knowledge and truth intersect to limit and/or provide opportunities for early childhood educational leaders and recognize, engage with and challenge the gendered and raced social and political construction of knowledge and identity. In enacting this image of leadership, early childhood professionals could indeed 'run amok' (St Pierre, 2004, p. 346) in ways that construct imaginative possibilities and open up lives and as such, ...'produce knowledge differently as we work for social justice..' (St Pierre, 2000b:27) in early childhood communities.

Conclusion

‘..it’s like a dance, really, and very hard to keep in time if you cannot hear the music or don’t understand the steps’ (Sue in Fitzgerald, 2010:99).

This paper has examined some of the ‘music’ and the ‘steps’ that are involved in early childhood educational leadership. Using some of the tools made available in feminist poststructural and postcolonial theory has enabled us to catch a glimpse of the complex, sometimes contradictory messages about the ‘dance’ that informs the practice of early childhood leadership. This work is important in the current national and international context for, in a time of great change in the early childhood field there is a need for educational leaders who are able to navigate and interpret these changes to implement them in practice with co-educators, families, children and communities. Many current dominant discourses of leadership are masculinised and leave early childhood educators hesitant to take leadership roles or once within them, are limited by how they can speak and act. Feminist poststructuralist and postcolonial leadership discourses work for gender and culturally equitable environments. It is past time that early childhood leaders and their communities had access to alternative feminist and feminist poststructural and postcolonial discourses of leadership that create opportunities for more collaborative, ethical, inclusive and socially just communities. It is our hope that this paper has contributed to this work.

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